

Developing a Defensive Game Plan

Introduction

One of the core components for any defense is devising a game plan for every weekly opponent. Interestingly, game planning is rarely a topic covered specifically by coaches at clinics or in professional magazines. However, all coaches have a system of game planning. This game plan is vital in preparing your team for success on game night.

Creating a defensive game plan for our opponent has become an essential part of our defense. We believe that no matter how much scheme you have installed, players need to be aware of what an opponent may do to attack your scheme. Our philosophy is to keep the scheme simple and use game planning to our advantage. Our goal is to develop a system to pinpoint tendencies and personnel weaknesses to maximize our scheme.

Additionally, a game plan is only productive if the players know it. If the system is too complicated, or can only be used by the coaches, then the plan does not help the players. They are the ones who need to be skillfully prepared for what the offense is going to do. Including the athlete in the details of the plan provides ownership and they become confident as a defensive unit.

Developing a Game Plan System

Because we do not have unlimited time to watch film or have players watch film, it is critical that our system is simple and well organized. A simple system also saves time when the film is broken down by the coaches. First and foremost we use a video software program that allows us to input information and output very specific data. The game plan system we have developed takes full advantage of the capabilities of the technology. Fusing our system with the technology has saved us time and allowed our focus to be on stopping the offense.

Each week we have a standard procedure that we follow. We typically will trade 2 or 3 game films with our opponent. We input this film into the computer and separate the offense, defense, and special teams. This allows us to only focus specifically on the opponent offense. Once the film is uploaded we break down each game from start to finish. Inputting information from the film usually takes the longest. However, once the film is broken down the data is at your fingertips. Our breakdown of film typically consists of the following:

1. Down and Distance
2. Hash
3. Run or Pass
4. Play Type

The first 3 steps are basic and most, if not all staffs, use this method. However, play identification is a much more intricate step. In order for the information to be valuable you must devise a common language or terminology. If you, your staff, and players all identify a play or personnel group differently then it will never be useful. This system can be structured in any manner your staff wants it to be, but it **MUST** be used consistently by everyone on the defensive side of the ball. Here are the components we emphasize for our **offensive terminology**:

1. **Personnel Groupings** -we assign a color to each group. (GRAY= 1 RB, 2 TE, 2 WR)
2. A **TAG** to represent where each skill player is aligned in the grouping. (RB-I, WR-Twins, TE-Pro/Con) This will further dissect the personnel group.
3. **Backfield Actions (RB, QB, Motion)**: Tailback Run (Number in the 40's), Pass (3-Step), Motion (left/right)
4. **Hole Numbering System**: which way is the play being run? 48=tailback run to the outside right)
5. **Base Run Plays** (what names do you want to give each play?): Toss
6. **Route Tree**: use for each WR on a pass play.

You really can use whatever parts and terminology your staff is comfortable with but creating a general system and sticking with it is the key. Once the film is broken with your terminology you can manipulate the data in a variety of ways. This gives you rich information to help focus the defensive unit on what they need to do to stop an opponent.

Now that we have a system in place we apply it on a weekly basis. The terminology NEVER changes. If we see something new from an offense, we add it to our database. This way as the year progresses the players are building on what we have been teaching all season. We have essentially created a universal offensive playbook to break down each of our weekly opponents. This uniform system is organized and simple that it is a useful teaching tool.

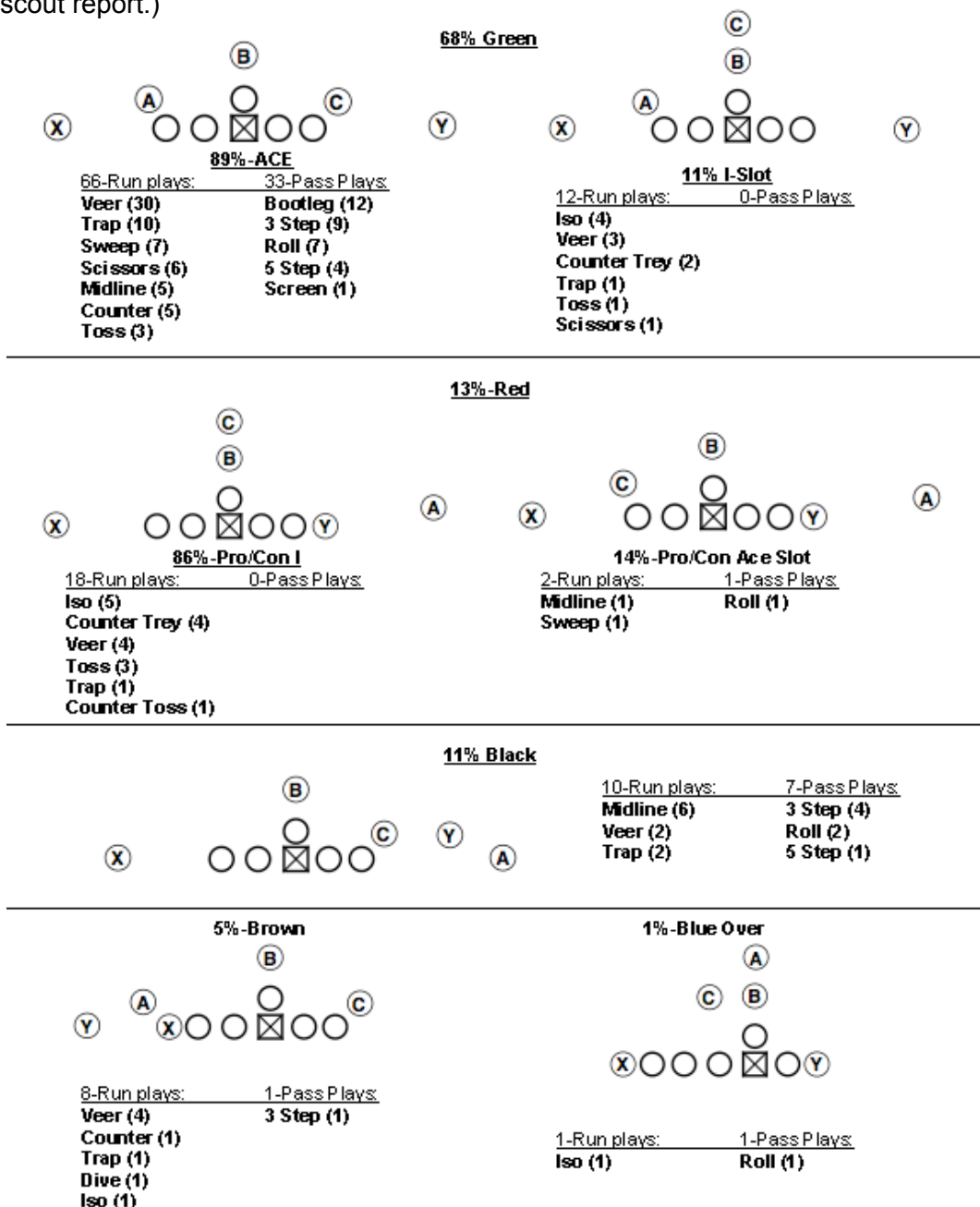
Utilizing the Data to Prepare

The development and implementation of our game plan system has evolved in my three years as defensive coordinator. Originally, we created the system to prepare ourselves as coaches but realized that we could teach our players the system as well. Most high school teams employ one of two offensive philosophies:

- Numerous formations with a small list of plays
- A few formations with a massive list of plays

Once we identify the type of offense we are playing we create a “cheat sheet” so to speak of offensive personnel groups. Each player receives one on Monday and we introduce the opponent on film. We highlight the personnel groups and what they have done most recently versus other opponents. **Figure 1.1** below is a sample cheat sheet that is distributed on Monday. (This is only one page. Many times there are 2-3 pages included in the scout report.)

Fig. 1.1



As you can see we have now narrowed down the opponent's offense to five specific personnel groupings. We **expect** that the players will learn the groupings and their core offense from those groups. Not all groupings will give you the exact play but it does give a sense of what the offense is trying to accomplish from group.

The main personnel group for this opponent is GREEN. In the 3 game films, this grouping was run 68% of the time. There were two backfield alignments: GREEN ACE and GREEN I SLOT. However, 89% of the time in this group they ran GREEN ACE. They were primarily an option team and when they ran option, it was typically out of this formation.

This kind of specific information not only provides direction to the players, it also assists in practice time organization. We have become so focused in our preparation that it allows us to draw play cards and present specific situations to our players within the parameters of our practices. We make sure that they see GREEN ACE so many times in film and on the practice field that when Friday Night comes they are reacting, which makes them faster.

Conclusion

The potential of creating and implementing a game plan system for your defense is unlimited. This process has become a vital part of our football program. It has created an atmosphere of trust and confidence between players and coaches. We have defensive players that will sit down a watch film on their free time so that they can learn the opponent and game plan. They will sit together and discuss the small things opponents do to get an edge. Our system has created "students" of the game and an appreciation for the complexity of the game of football.

Coach Aurin is entering his 4th year as defensive coordinator at Dublin Jerome High School. Last season Jerome's defense gave up on average 9.4 points/game and 191 yards/game. If you would like to know more about his game planning system and organization please contact him at coachaurin@jeromefootball.com.